

# TRADITIONAL HOME

May 2012

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# Marvelous Marbles

ARTIST ELIZABETH TURK TRANSFORMS BLOCKS OF STONE INTO DELICATE LACE AND SENSUOUS RIBBONS

WRITTEN AND PRODUCED BY DORIS ATHINEOS



Artist Elizabeth Turk can shred a 500-pound block of white Carrara marble into ribbons and lace. Armed with a high-speed dental drill, she turns stone into sculptures that seem both instantly recognizable and utterly abstract. Inspired by the way fish dart through water, she created her "Ribbons" series, which looks like soft, sensuous fabrics unfolding. ►

Above Artist Elizabeth Turk's 5-foot-wide marble *Pinwheel #1* actually spins. Top, from left Scrap marble from a Dallas door frame became *Cage: Box 7*, part of her newest sculpture series. The artist cradles *Line #3*

The abstract quality of the bold line feels modern, but "Ribbons" also evokes the timeless folds and drapes of ancient tunics.

Just how this recent MacArthur Genius Grant winner coaxed such flowing, fluid folds out of a weighty chunk of stone is a wonder—but not a surprise. Previously, she focused on the pleated, ruffled collars worn by Rembrandt's burghers to create a series of marble lace collars.

"The collars were an homage to the 400th birthday of Rembrandt," explains the Santa Ana, California-based Turk, who is represented by Hirschl & Adler Modern gallery ([www.hirschlandadler.com](http://www.hirschlandadler.com)) in Manhattan, where she met with *Traditional Home*.

"When the diamond bit is sharp, I feel like I'm carving through ice cream," she says, but the sanding and filing is repetitive, like meditation—"a bit like handling rosary beads." Visually, the collars are also a nod to the sun-bleached animal bones that populate paintings by artist Georgia O'Keeffe but also the ▶



### White Collar

Decked out in sumptuous white fluted and lace collars, Rembrandt's burghers inspired Turk's life-size *Collar* series. She studied the antique lace collar collection at the Mint Museum of Art in Charlotte, North Carolina. "Marble's a memorial stone, and I like memorializing something that's feminine," she says. *Collar #6* (left) is shaved so thin that light shines through it.

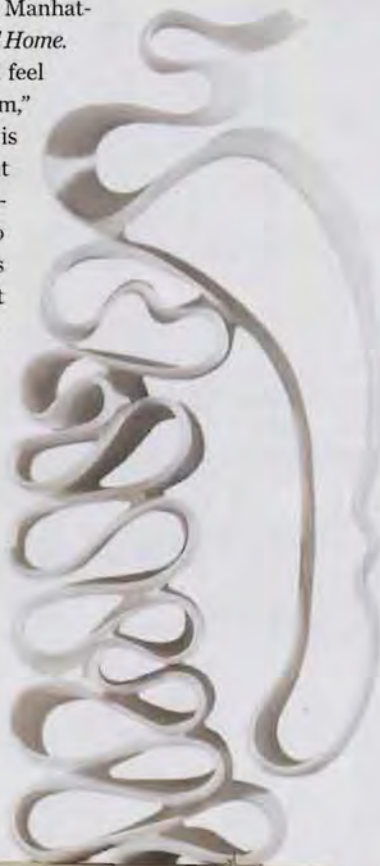


### Magical Garden

Turk created a dream-like print with meandering blue ivy and bewhiskered purple fish, available at Galerie Lareuse in Washington, D.C. "After all the loud, dirty work at the quarry, it's nice to come home and do something detailed, clean, and quiet."

### Fluid Folds

From heavy stone come airy ribbons whose profiles shift as you walk around them. "My work plays with intuitive notions of gravity," writes Turk. "As I fold the precarious strips of my ribbons, I adapt to the various restrictions in stone that emerge unexpectedly in the course of carving." Turk's sculptures rest on limestone bases marked with her writing and drawings, which she describes as "ancient and contemporary, scientific and spiritual."



From left Ribbon #11, Ribbon #13, Ribbon #10.

## Elizabeth's Rib

Rib-like *Collar #7* lies under Southern California's Huntington Beach Pier. "When, after four years of making it, you stick the piece in the waves on the beach, it talks back," explains Turk. "It stops being this precious object. As the waves came, they would take the stone back into the sea. The piece didn't break because of the latticework's strength. The matrix is incredibly strong."




patterns of science (DNA's twisty double helix) and nature (shell spirals, flower petals, sea amoeba).

"The act of creating is thought of as additive, but I think reductively," explains Turk, whose biggest challenge is gravity and "figuring out how far to push the curve of the stone." She doesn't preplan all the twists and turns. "It's not an execution of a design; it's more of a conversation. The stone has its own imperfections or strengths that I work around," explains the slender, soft-spoken artist who prefers to use abandoned marble recycled from building projects. "The marble block for *Cage: Box 7* was cut for a Dallas doorway and left as debris," she says.

For the final finish, Turk's collars catch some waves in a cathedral-like setting under the Huntington Beach Pier in Southern California. "After two to four years of work, I let go. I put them into the water—the ocean or a pool. After so much ego and intention, it's an amazing feeling to let go. For me, the carving really needs this finish." Under her watchful eye, the pieces marinate in sea and salt for a few hours.

Turk doesn't limit herself to sculpture. Her drawings and prints are represented by Georgetown's Galerie Lareuse ([galerielareuse.com](http://galerielareuse.com)) in Washington, D.C.

"We've been around for almost 30 years, and Elizabeth is one of the only living artists we represent," says gallerist Kreg Kelley. Prices begin at about \$500. 

## Inspiration: Bee-stung Lips



Artist Elizabeth Turk admires the fragmentary head of an Egyptian queen, possibly Nefertiti, at NYC's Metropolitan Museum of Art. Made of highly polished yellow jasper, the fragment is some 3,400 years old, but it still speaks to Turk. "It is so gracefully articulated. The absence of the rest of the work creates a compelling mystery. Simply said, I find it beautiful."

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